

Press release: Over 150,000 annual deaths from lung cancer, lung and heart disease

Public Health England (PHE) has launched a national 'Be Clear on Cancer' awareness campaign which prompts people with symptoms of some of the leading causes of death in England to see their doctor.

Lung cancer, heart disease and lung disease cause more than 150,000 deaths in England each year. Early diagnosis can save lives and improve the quality of life of those living with conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a common form of lung disease that includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Getting out of breath doing things you used to be able to do, or having a cough that has lasted for 3 weeks or more, could be a sign of lung disease, including lung cancer. Breathlessness can also be a sign of heart disease. As well as prompting anyone with these symptoms to see their GP, the campaign also calls on people to look out for each other and encourage friends and family to act.

This call comes as a new survey found that adults over 50 are more likely to encourage others to see the doctor than go themselves. The survey found that:

- 86% would urge friends and family with these symptoms to see their GP
- only 67% would contact the GP themselves if they experienced symptoms

The campaign is aimed at men and women aged 50 and above who are most at risk of lung cancer, COPD and heart disease.

In England, there are around 1.8 million people who have been diagnosed with coronary heart disease (CHD), the main type of heart disease and 1 million people diagnosed with COPD. Around 37,600 people are diagnosed with lung cancer each year.

Early diagnosis and treatment can make a big difference to the quality of life and help people live longer. However, late diagnosis is common. The survey found a third (32%) of people would wait for a month or longer before visiting the GP if they experienced breathlessness doing everyday things and over half (55%) would wait over a month before speaking to their GP if they had a persistent cough.

The campaign reassures people that they would not be wasting their GP's time by getting their symptoms checked out – something a third of adults surveyed said they would be worried about.

Julia Verne, Clinical Lead for PHE, commented:

Breathlessness and a persistent cough are symptoms that can be easily ignored or put down to getting older, or seen as just minor health niggles. But these symptoms can be warning signs and it is really important to get them checked out by a doctor.

People are more likely to urge others to seek medical help for these symptoms than to speak to a GP themselves. If anyone has concerns, we would encourage them to seek medical advice, as getting help early rather than waiting until the problem gets worse is vital.

Early diagnosis saves lives and can improve quality of life for people with long term conditions, so if you find yourself getting out of breath doing things you used to be able to do, or if you have a cough that has lasted for 3 weeks or more, get it checked out.

Background

1. [Public Health England](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Follow us on Twitter: [@PHE_uk](#) and Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland.
2. Be Clear on Cancer campaigns are run by PHE in partnership with the Department of Health and NHS England.
3. Be Clear on Cancer campaigns, which aim to raise public awareness of the symptoms of cancer and encourage earlier presentation, are included in the report of the Independent Cancer Taskforce 'Achieving World-Class Cancer Outcomes: A Strategy for England 2015 to 2020'. The campaigns also form part of PHE's Annual Business Plan for 2017 to 2018.
4. Celebrity supporters of this campaign include Arlene Philips, Dame Esther Rantzen and Lucy Briers. Quotes from the celebrities are included below.
5. Pictures, quotes and video footage of celebrity ambassadors are available on [dropbox](#).
6. Interview opportunities with PHE, HCPs and case studies are available upon request.
7. The campaign includes national TV, radio, digital and out of home advertising, together with face to face events in venues such as shopping centres.
8. Symptoms of lung disease (including lung cancer) and heart disease include:
 - a persistent cough that lasts 3 weeks or more
 - getting out of breath doing things that you used to be able to do, such as:
 - vacuuming
 - mowing the lawn

- walking at a normal pace (and struggling to keep up with friends)
- moving from the sofa to make a cup of tea
- dressing and undressing yourself
- climbing short flights of stairs
- a cough that has got worse or changes
- frequent chest infections
- coughing up blood
- chest pain or shoulder pain
- wheezing
- feeling more tired than usual for some time
- losing weight for no obvious reason

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor.

Additional spokespeople quotes:

Arlene Phillips, whose best friend died from lung cancer, is supporting the campaign and commented:

My best friend, Molly Molloy, passed away last year from lung cancer. She had this cough that didn't seem to go away, but every time I asked her about it she said it was a virus and it would go – we had no idea that the cough was a symptom of something more serious until it was too late. This campaign is so important and I hope everyone takes note – if you have a cough that has lasted for 3 weeks or more, go and see your doctor, don't ignore it. Or if you notice a friend or loved one who has had a cough for longer than 3 weeks, push them to see the GP. It could save their life.

Dame Esther Rantzen, whose late husband had heart disease, commented:

My husband was diagnosed with heart disease in 1986. We were very lucky he went to see the GP when he first had symptoms, because it enabled him to be treated and he could manage his condition. It gave us 15 extra years we might not have had, which I am so grateful for. Everyone gets breathless now and again, but if it feels unusual or you're getting out of breath doing everyday things, you must go and see the GP – don't put these symptoms down to old age or think it's just because of your lifestyle. It might be something more serious and early diagnosis can make a huge difference. Also if you notice changes in loved ones – if you notice them getting out of breath doing things they used to do fine – give them the nudge to visit their doctor. It really could make a huge difference.

Lucy Briers, whose father Richard Briers had lung disease, said:

My father, Richard Briers had COPD, which is a form of lung disease. We didn't know very much about lung disease before my father's diagnosis – sadly I don't think many people do until they know someone who has been affected. But we knew that it was a chronic condition and the sooner you are given a diagnosis the better. With the help of his doctor, the exercises and the medication that he was on, my father was able to carry on living his life as normal for several years after his diagnosis – he even did a play. My message to you is don't be afraid, go and see the GP if you notice you are getting out of breath or you have a cough that's lasted for 3 weeks or more – this is your body telling you something could be wrong and you need to get to the GP. Of course, it might not be anything serious, but if it is, a diagnosis and treatment can make a huge difference.

Professor Mike Morgan, National Clinical Director for Respiratory Services, said:

As the National Clinical Director responsible for respiratory services I am constantly striving to reduce the number of deaths from lung disease, including lung cancer. People may not realise that getting out of breath easily or developing a persistent cough could be a sign of something serious, so don't go to their doctor. These signs shouldn't be brushed aside – getting help early, rather than waiting until the problem gets worse, is vital.

Professor Huon Gray, National Clinical Director for Heart Disease from NHS England, commented:

Coronary heart disease is the single biggest cause of death in England, accounting for around 12% of all deaths annually. If we are to improve patient outcomes in England, it is critical that we raise awareness of the symptoms associated with this condition. The earlier heart disease is diagnosed, the better – treatment can help manage the symptoms, reduce disability and prevent cardiovascular events such as heart attack and stroke.

Dr Matt Kearney, National Clinical Director for Cardiovascular Disease Prevention from NHS England, commented:

Over 150,000 deaths in England each year are attributed to heart disease, lung disease and lung cancer. With such a high number of deaths being down to these diseases, we need to take action so we are delighted that Public Health England is running this campaign. It's crucial that people are aware of the signs and symptoms, to give those with these diseases the best chance of an early diagnosis.

Dr Penny Woods, Chief Executive of the British Lung Foundation, said:

We know lung disease kills 1 person every 5 minutes in the UK. Early diagnosis and treatment are key to preventing irreversible damage.

You should make an appointment with your GP if you feel breathlessness doing everyday tasks. It could be an important sign of respiratory disease. Don't put it off.

Dr Mike Knapton, associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation, said:

Coronary heart disease is still one of the biggest killers in England causing over 56,000 deaths every year. Thanks to years of research we are now able to effectively treat and manage coronary heart disease and resulting conditions such as heart failure. But early diagnosis and treatment is key. It is therefore vital to look out for symptoms, including breathlessness, and to contact your doctor as soon as possible if you are concerned.

Paula Chadwick, Chief Executive of the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation said:

It is really encouraging to see the long-standing Be Clear on Cancer campaign continuing to help raise vital awareness of the crucial symptoms to look out for that could be a sign of lung cancer. So many people may otherwise simply 'shrug off' something like a persistent cough, yet to do so can have potentially devastating consequences. Anyone with a cough for 3 weeks or more should go and see their GP to get it checked. You have nothing to lose by making the appointment and it could ultimately save your life.